DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 469 486 HE 035 311

TITLE	International Quality Review and Accreditation: The Role of U.S. Recognized Accrediting Organizations. CHEA Letter from the President.
INSTITUTION	Council for Higher Education Accreditation, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2002-08-00
NOTE	6p.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.chea.org/Research/InternatQualRevLtrPres2002.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Accreditation (Institutions); *Accrediting Agencies; *Higher Education; *International Programs; Study Abroad

ABSTRACT

In fall 2001, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) surveyed the 78 CHEA and U.S. Department of Education recognized institutional and programmatic accreditors in the United States to learn whether and to what extent these accreditors are operating internationally. A similar survey in 1999 had indicated that 34 U.S. accreditors accredited 355 institutions or programs in 65 countries. About half of these were U.S. operations. Respondents to the 2001 survey were 53 accreditors, 5 national, 6 regional, and 42 specialized/professional organizations. Twenty-nine (62.9%) indicated they were operating internationally. These included all of the national accreditors and all of the responding regional accreditors, but only 42% (18) of the responding specialized accreditors. These organizations accredit 461 institutions and programs in 65 countries outside the United States, and 9 non-U.S. institutions operating within the United States. The type of international accrediting activity varies with the type of accreditor. It is also noted that almost all the international activity of U.S. accreditors is with site-based operations, with only two specialized accreditors reviewing distance-based operations. Results suggest a considerable current interest in international quality review and a growing number of international initiatives by accrediting agencies. (SLD)

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ED 469 486

International Quality Review and Accreditation: The Role of U.S. Recognized Accrediting Organizations

August 2002

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CHEA

Council for Higher Education Accreditation

Letter from the President

International Quality Review and Accreditation: The Role of U.S. Recognized Accrediting Organizations

August 2002

In fall 2001, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) surveyed the 78 CHEA and United States Department of Education (USDE) recognized institutional and programmatic accreditors in the United States to learn whether and to what extent these accreditors are operating internationally.

CHEA conducted a similar (but not comparable) survey in 1999 looking at a smaller number of accrediting organizations (55). This survey indicated that 34 U.S. accreditors accredited 355 institutions or programs in 65 countries. Approximately one-half of the institutions and programs were U.S. operations in other countries and the remaining half were non-U.S. operations in other countries. For the results of the 1999 survey, please go to the CHEA Website at www.chea.org.

Fifty-three (53) accreditors responded to the 2001 survey: 5 national, 6 regional, and 42 specialized/professional accrediting organizations. National and regional accreditors review institutions; specialized/professional accreditors review programs and single-purpose schools. Although the remaining accrediting organizations were requested to respond on two additional occasions, CHEA was unable to obtain information from them.

General Findings

The survey yielded a valuable profile of accreditors operating outside the U.S.

- Twenty-nine of the 53 accrediting organizations (62.9%) that responded to the survey indicated that they were operating internationally:
  - 5 of 5 (100%) responding national accreditors,
  - 6 of 6 (100%) responding regional accreditors, and
  - 18 of 42 (42.8%) responding specialized accreditors.
- These 29 organizations accredit 461 institutions and programs in 65 countries outside the U.S. as of fall 2001. They also accredit 9 non-U.S. institutions operating within the U.S.
- Two of the 53 responding accrediting organizations have separate standards for accrediting internationally.
- The predominant type of international accrediting activity varies with the type of accreditor: regional accreditors are more involved in accrediting U.S. institutions operating outside the U.S. while specialized accreditors are more active in accrediting non-U.S. programs operating outside the U.S.
- Almost all of the international activity of U.S. accreditors is with site-based operations. Only two specialized accreditors reported review of distance-based offerings and each accredits one distance-based operation.

Table 1

General Findings: Recognized Accrediting Organizations Operating Outside the U.S.

	Number of Accreditors Operating Outside the U.S.	Number of Institutions or Programs	Number of Separate Accreditation Standards for Non-U.S. Institutions or Programs
National	5	46	0
Regional	6	205	0
Specialized	18	210	2
TOTALS	29	461*	2

*Nine non-U.S. institutions and programs are accredited by U.S. organizations and operate *in the U.S.*

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Responding organizations were asked these questions about institutions and programs operating internationally:

- Do you accredit *U.S.* institutions or programs operating *outside the U.S.?*
- Do you accredit *non-U.S.* institutions or programs operating *outside the U.S.?*
- Do you accredit *non-U.S.* institutions or programs operating *inside the U.S.?*
- Have you developed *separate* accreditation standards for accreditation review of *non-U.S. institutions and programs?*

They were also asked these questions:

- How many of the institutions and programs that you accredit are primarily site-based and how many are primarily distance-based?
- In what countries is your organization reviewing institutions or programs?

Do you accredit *U.S.* institutions or programs operating *outside the U.S.?*

Sixteen (16) of 53 responding organizations (30.1%) accredit U.S. institutions or programs operating outside the U.S.:

- 2 of 5 national accrediting organizations (40%),
- 5 of 6 regional accrediting organizations (83.3%), and
- 9 of 42 specialized accrediting organizations (21.4 %).

These 16 organizations accredit 225 U.S. institutions or programs operating outside the U.S.:

- National organizations accredit 9 operations,
- Regional organizations accredit 194 operations, and
- Specialized organizations accredit 22 operations.

Table 2

	Organizations Accrediting U.S. Institutions or Programs Outside the U.S.	# of Institutions or Programs
National	2	9
Regional	5	194
Specialized	9	22
TOTALS	16	225

Do you accredit *non-U.S.* institutions or programs operating *outside the U.S.?*

Twenty-four of 53 of respondents (45.2%) are accrediting non-U.S. institutions or programs operating outside the U.S.:

- 5 of 5 national accreditors (100%),
- 2 of 6 regional accreditors (33.3%), and
- 17 of 42 specialized accreditors (40.4%).

These 24 organizations accredit 236 institutions or programs:

- National organizations accredit 37 operations,
- Regional organizations accredit 11 operations, and
- Specialized organizations accredit 188 operations.

Table 3

	Organizations Accrediting Non-U.S. Institutions or Programs Outside the U.S.	# of Institutions or Programs
National	5	37
Regional	2	11
Specialized	17	188
TOTALS	24	236

Do you accredit *non-U.S.* institutions or programs operating *in the U.S.?*

One national organization accredits three operations and four regional organizations accredit six operations. None of the responding specialized organizations accredit institutions or programs in this category.

Table 4

	Organizations Accrediting Non-U.S. Institutions or Programs Operating in the U.S.	# of Institutions or Programs
National	1	3
Regional	4	6
Specialized	0	0
TOTALS	5	9

Have you developed *separate* accreditation standards for accreditation review of *non-U.S.* institutions and programs?

Two of the 53 responding accreditors (3.7%) have developed separate accreditation standards for review of institutions or programs outside the U.S. Both are specialized accreditors.

Table 5

	Separate Accreditation Standards for Non-U.S. Institutions or Programs
National	0
Regional	0
Specialized	2
TOTALS	2

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How many of the institutions or programs that are accredited are site-based (the primary means of instruction involves face-to-face communication) and how many are distance-based (the primary means of instruction does not involve face-to-face communication, e.g., correspondence, computed-mediated, video-based)?
Of the 23 accreditors that responded to this question, only 2 specialized organizations indicated that they reviewed distance learning operations and each had accredited one such operation. All other institutions and programs were described as site-based operations.

In what countries is your organization reviewing institutions or programs?
Responding accreditors identified 65 individual countries in which they accredit institutions or programs. A number of these countries were identified by more than one accreditor. (Table 6)

Discussion

While comparable data on prior international accreditation activity is not available, the results of the 2001 survey suggest a considerable current interest in international quality review, with 29 recognized U.S. organizations accrediting 461 institutions and programs in 65 countries and 9 non-U.S. institutions for programs operating in the U.S. And, anecdotal information and frequent queries from accreditors indicates that this interest is growing: more U.S. institutions and programs are seeking to operate internationally and more non-U.S. institutions are interested in obtaining U.S. accreditation. Reasons for this include:

- Countries outside the U.S. continue to develop quality assurance and accreditation organizations and examine the lengthy experience of the U.S. as one source of ideas and tools for their endeavors.
- U.S. accrediting organizations seek to benefit from what they can learn from quality review practices in other countries.
- U.S. colleges and universities continue to offer programs and degrees abroad.
- U.S. accrediting organizations are called upon to accredit internationally more frequently than in the past.
- The continued growth of distance learning has resulted in some need for those engaged in quality review in various countries to work together.

U.S. accrediting organizations have a variety of international initiatives underway:

- AACSB–International, a major accrediting organization for schools of business, has been accrediting internationally for a number of years. Most recently, AACSB has been conducting seminars and training sessions for its international work. And, the AACSB international experience is providing a foundation for a thorough revision of standards in the organization.
- The Accreditation Bureau for Engineering and Technology, Inc. (ABET) has been a leader in international quality review of engineering programs as well as in the establishment of the Washington Accord, an agreement in which signatory organizations in 9 countries have agreed to recognize the substantial equivalency of accreditation systems and the engineering education programs accredited by them.
- The 8 regional accrediting commissions are exploring a joint initiative in international review of institutions. They are examining whether review of American-style institutions outside the U.S. might be undertaken through the regional commissions working together.

Table 6
Responding Organizations Reported Accrediting Activity in 65 Countries

1. Australia
2. Austria
3. Bahamas
4. Belgium
5. Bermuda
6. British Virgin Islands
7. Brazil
8. Bulgaria
9. Canada
10. Chile
11. China
12. Columbia
13. Costa Rica
14. Crete
15. Cuba
16. Cyprus
17. Dominican Republic
18. Ecuador
19. England
20. Estonia
21. France
22. Germany
23. Greece
24. Guam
25. Haiti
26. Holland (Netherlands)
27. Hong Kong, China
28. Hungary
29. Iceland
30. India
31. Ireland
32. Israel
33. Italy
34. Jamaica
35. Japan
36. Kenya
37. Korea
38. Kuwait
39. Malaysia
40. Mexico
41. Morocco
42. Myanmar
43. Nigeria
44. Panama
45. Peru
46. Philippines
47. Poland
48. Portugal
49. Puerto Rico
50. Romania
51. Russia
52. Saudi Arabia
53. Scotland
54. Singapore
55. South Africa
56. Spain
57. Sweden
58. Switzerland
59. Taiwan
60. Tanzania
61. Thailand
62. Trinidad
63. United Arab Emirates
64. Uruguay
65. Venezuela

Table 7

Summary: Analysis of Numbers of Accredited Institutions and Programs by Type of Accreditor and Type of International Activity

Accreditors Operating Outside the U.S.	Number of Accredited U.S. Institutions or Programs Operating Outside the U.S.	Number of Accredited Non-U.S. Institutions or Programs Operating Outside the U.S.	Number of Accredited Non-U.S. Institutions or Programs Operating In the U.S.	TOTAL
National (5)	9	37	3	49
Regional (6)	194	11	6	211
Specialized (18)	22	188	0	210
TOTALS (29)	225	236	9	470

CHEA has pursued a number of activities in international quality review:

- CHEA International Principles were developed in 2001 and provide a framework for U.S. accreditors working internationally, asking, for example, that accrediting organizations assure that they have the capacity to undertake these reviews and that they are in communication with the quality assurance organization in a country in which they are working.
- CHEA has established an International Commission, a forum of quality review and institutional leaders for communication, information exchange, and launching quality review projects of benefit to many countries around the world.
- CHEA is developing an International Database of accreditation and quality review organizations to provide basic contact information about quality review organizations in all countries.

CHEA's goal is to work with U.S. accreditors to assure that efforts in the international area are handled in a careful and thoughtful manner. CHEA is also interested in acting as a responsible partner in concert with colleagues in the international community, especially as this relates to framing the key issues and challenges confronting many countries around the world.

An issue of growing significance to the international community is whether or not to establish international standards for quality. There is considerable debate about this, with some expressing strong preference for national standards, others with an interest in regional standards, and yet others who believe that international standards are essential.

The International Association of University Presidents (IAUP), the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), and the National Committee for International Trade in Education (NCITE) have been discussing international standards for some time. Those who believe that international standards are needed for quality in higher education focus on the growing globalization of higher education and the call for shared understanding about quality judgments in various countries.

Some supra-national organizations are giving increasing attention to quality assurance. These include the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank, and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In general, these organizations favor the development of regional or international quality standards as they focus on the role of higher education in the economic development of individual countries.

Governments are also interested in international quality review as this relates to higher education. The World Trade Organization (WTO), under the auspices of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), is engaged in a round of negotiations that include liberalization of trade in services. "Trade in services" involves higher education and thus attention to quality review. There is a good deal of debate about how and whether quality review of higher education issues should be addressed in a trade forum.

This level and diversity of activity in international quality review likely means:

- Increased higher education exchange among various countries,
- Increased quality review activities across borders,
- Expansion of bi-lateral and regional quality review agreements, and
- Continued debate and discussion about national, regional, or international standards for higher education quality

Many questions remain unanswered in the arena of international quality review. However, a robust international conversation is underway and will continue.

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Date Filmed
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